

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COTONO 00773 251003Z

ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 L-03 SCS-06 SSO-00 H-01 HA-05

CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 INRE-00 /036 W

-----111392 251007Z /11

O 251000Z MAY 78

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 767

AMEMBASSY LAGOS IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 773

LAGOS FOR DEPUTY ASST SEC HARROP

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC, DM

SUBJ: VISIT OF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARROP

REF: A. COTONOU 763 B. COTONOU 724 C. STATE 132047

D. STATE 125809

1. GOVERNMENT OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) OFFICIALS ARE AWARE THAT PRIMARY PURPOSE OF HARROP VISIT IS BENNETT CASE. BELIEVE THAT REF A SHOULD SETTLE DOUBTS ON THAT ISSUE. AS FOR APPOINTMENTS, WE NOTED IN REF B THAT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT TO LINE UP APPOINTMENTS IN LESS THAN TWO WEEK PERIOD. AT THAT TIME WE WERE SPEAKING IN TERMS OF NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES. A SUCCESSION OF HEADS OF STATE VISITS HAS SIGNIFICANTLY COMPLICATED OBTAINING ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, ALL RPT ALL OF WHOM ARE INVOLVED IN MAKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR PARADES, SOLIDARITY MEETINGS, RECEPTIONS, BANQUETS, ETC. THUS, WORK VIRTUALLY CEASES THROUGHOUT GPRB WHEN THIS KIND OF PROTOCOL EVENT TAKES PLACE. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES WE FEEL THAT WE WERE EXTREMELY FORTUNATE IN OBTAINING THE APPOINTMENTS WITH FOREIGN MINISTER.

2. AS FOR APPOINTMENTS WITH OFFICIALS HAVING DIRECT DECISION

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ROLE IN BENNETT CASE, FOREIGN MINISTER IS APPROPRIATE CONTACT POINT SINCE BENINESE ATTACH GREAT IMPORTANCE TO PROPER CHANNELS. ULTIMATE DECISION MAKER IS PRESIDENT KEREKOU AND WE BELIEVE DEPARTMENT CAN APPRECIATE REASONS WHY WE DID NOT TRY TO SEEK AUDIENCE WITH PRESIDENT AT THIS TIME. AS ALSO NOTED IN REF B, WE HAVE HAD DOUBTS ABOUT THE UTILITY OF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARROP'S VISIT AT THIS TIME. OUR DOUBTS,

HOWEVER, WERE OVERRULED BY DEPARTMENT'S DECISION IN REF D.
AT THIS LATE STAGE WE CAN SIMPLY DO OUT BEST TO MAKE THE VISIT
A SUCCESS IN TERMS OF ACCELERATING BENNETT'S RELEASE.

3. FYI: ONLY OTHER OFFICIAL WITH DIRECT SAY IN CASE IS KEREKOU'S
DEPUTY, INDUSTRY AND CRAFTS MINISTER OHOUENS. OHOUENS, HOWEVER,
IS CURRENTLY IN PARIS AND WILL NOT BE IN COTONOU ON MAY 26.
SINCE OHOUENS HAS A POTENTIALLY EMBARRASSING RELATIONSHIP
WITH BENNETT'S ANTAGONIST HAMZA, IT IS DOUBTFUL WHETHER
OHOUENS WOULD HAVE BEEN APPROPRIATE CHOICE FOR REPRESENTATIONS
HARROP PLANS TO MAKE.
THOMPSON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CITIZEN PROTECTION, VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978COTON000773
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780220-1039
Format: TEL
From: COTONOU
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780521/aaaaarar.tel
Line Count: 74
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 5af74497-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 COTONOU 763, 78 STATE 125809
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2577043
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: VISIT OF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARROP
TAGS: CASC, OTRA, PEPR, DM, (HARROP, WILLIAM C)
To: STATE LAGOS
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/5af74497-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014